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## **Making Time for Your Family**

Most people agree that their relationships with their spouses and children are what make life satisfying and meaningful. It is easy to feel like you don't have enough time in a busy week to spend relaxing with your partner and children. However, the most important relationships in your life deserve your time and attention. If work and other responsibilities are slicing into the time you spend with your family, it is time to reevaluate your priorities, reexamine your values and put more balance into your life. Remember, even small blocks of time together can make a big difference in the quality of your relationships.

### **Time with Your Spouse**

In a two-parent family, your relationship with your spouse is the framework for the family structure. Intimacy is what makes this framework strong. Spend at least an hour of private time with your spouse every day, no matter how busy you are with work and parenting responsibilities. Even if you don't have time for romance, this is a good time to talk about feelings and share news of the day. If you have something difficult to talk about, approach your mate when you're both relaxed. Avoid bringing up challenging situations right when you or your spouse walks in the door after a hard day at work. Respect your spouse's need for personal time, as well as togetherness.

You'd be surprised how a little private time together in a new environment can enrich your relationship and give you both a new perspective on your busy lives. Try these relationship tips:

- Get out your calendar and make a date with your spouse for the first free evening you can find. Plan to do something you haven't done in a long time.
- Make dates each month so you have something special to look forward to.
- Add a bit of spontaneity to your lives by surprising your partner with reservations at a favorite restaurant or a fun night out.

### **Time with Your Kids**

Children derive their sense of self-esteem from their relationship with their parents. They depend on their parents to set limits for their behavior and to be role models for expressing their feelings and behaving responsibly. Healthy communication builds self-esteem: a child who can depend on the consistent, loving attention of a parent feels cared for, important and safe.

One of the great joys of parenting is discovering and nurturing your child's personality and passions. Plan time together to find out what makes your child happy. This also will give your child an opportunity to know you better. When you're together, make simple listening and talking a priority. Try to forget about goals; the point of togetherness is to discover and appreciate each other, not necessarily to create the perfect craft project or to skate around the block.

No matter how busy you are, your kids need your undivided time and attention on a regular basis. Be

sure to:

- Spend your first 15 minutes at home listening to your children;
- Mark on the calendar part of each weekend for some private time with each child to do something you both enjoy; and
- Take each of your children to breakfast or lunch once a month. This allows for solid one-to-one communication.

Although you may feel too tired to toss a football around the backyard at the end of the day, you can connect with your kids by playing quiet games or asking them to tell you about their day. Enjoy the intimacy of your kids' nighttime rituals. Use bedtime to cuddle up and share a favorite book.

## Time as a Family

Make the most of family time by scheduling regular family meetings to assign chores and discuss family goals and problems. This is an excellent way to involve children in problem solving, such as deciding how to spend a summer vacation, figuring out how to keep the living room neater or choosing a weekly dinner menu.

You can make family errands more fun by bringing along the kids and topping off your expeditions with a stop for ice cream. Older children can help cut shopping time by taking part of the shopping list and meeting you at the cash register. Make meal times more pleasurable by turning off the television and focusing on conversation. Use the time to catch up on the day's events and reconnect with each family member.

Take advantage of leisure time to get to know your children outside the normal time pressures of school and work schedules. Plan family vacations, weekend outings and other recreational activities that everyone can enjoy together. The fun of having a good time together or the thrill of a shared adventure creates family memories you can all enjoy for many years to come.

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